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DE RUEHKU #1638/01 1291054
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 091054Z MAY 06
FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4359
INFO RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 05 KUWAIT 001638

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/08/2026

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [KU](#) [ISLAMISTS](#)

SUBJECT: UNDERSTANDING THE KUWAITI MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD'S
POLITICAL WING: THE ISLAMIC CONSTITUTIONAL MOVEMENT, PART II

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ON KUWAITI POLITICS
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SKETCH OF THE ICM

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

(C) This is Part II of a two-part message (see Kuwait 1637
for Part I). Part II covers the Islamic Constitutional
Movement's (ICM) policy positions, funding, and publications.

It also outlines Kuwaiti liberals' views on the ICM and
concludes by recommending limited engagement with the
organization on shared political objectives. Part I
addressed the ICM's origins, influence, structure, and
connection to the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood (KMB).

Policy Positions: Politically Liberal...

[1](#)19. (C) The ICM is one of the most vocal advocates of
political reform in Kuwait. In particular, the organization
has actively lobbied for a reduction in the number of
electoral constituencies, official Government recognition of
political parties, stronger anti-corruption measures, a
reduction in the voting age from 21 to 18, police and
military suffrage, and a rotation of power by allowing
Parliament to choose the Prime Minister. ICM leaders insist
they are "firmly committed" to working within Kuwait's
democratic system to achieve their political objectives, even
if it means being voted out of office. "We have to accept
what the majority wants, even if it differs from our views,"

MP Nasser Al-Sane told Poloff, pointing to the KMB's "long history of political cooperation in Kuwait." In an effort to increase transparency and limit corruption at the national level, ICM MPs Al-Sane and Mohammed Al-Basiri took the unprecedented step of providing their complete personal and family financial records to Parliament in January; no other MPs followed suit.

¶20. (C) ICM leaders strongly condemn terrorist violence, specifically in Iraq and Kuwait, though they are notably silent on Palestinian violence against Israel. Secretary General Dr. Bader Al-Nashi told Poloff the ICM was working with leading Sunni clerics on a statement condemning terrorism. (Note: In 2003, the UN listed Lajnat Al-Daawa Al-Islamiyya (LDI) - a Kuwait-based NGO affiliated with the Social Reform Society (SRS), the social wing of the KMB - as a terrorist-supporting organization and some 1.4 million KD (approximately \$4.5 million) of the NGO's assets were frozen. The ICM has vehemently denied any involvement, even remotely through any of its affiliate organizations, in terrorist financing activities. End note.)

¶21. (C) The ICM supported the U.S.-led liberation of Iraq, but now has some concerns about Sunni exclusion from, and Iranian influence on, the nascent Iraqi government, according to Al-Nashi. Despite their criticisms of specific U.S. policies, ICM leaders like Al-Dallal are quick to point out, "While we may disagree with the U.S. on certain issues that will not stop us from cooperating or entering into treaties with the USG."

¶22. (C) On Iran, Al-Nashi told Poloff the ICM supported a nuclear-free Middle East and opposed both Iran's and Israel's nuclear program. Dr. Hamad Al-Matar, a Chemical Science

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professor and an ICM member of the younger, more moderate persuasion, recently asked Poloff for information highlighting Iran's poor technological safeguards and inability to adequately protect its nuclear facilities to use during a televised interview on the potential environmental impact of Iran's nuclear program on Kuwait.

¶23. (C) The ICM is also very pragmatic in its relations with Kuwait's Shi'a community. (Note: Approximately one third of Kuwaiti citizens are Shi'a. End note.) The ICM has coordinated positions on parliamentary issues with Shi'a political associations, and strongly condemned sectarian violence in Iraq, such as the bombing of the Shi'a shrine in Samarra (ref C). According to Al-Dallal, the ICM is even developing a plan to incorporate non-KMB members into the ICM, starting with other Sunnis and gradually moving to also include Shi'a.

¶24. (C) The ICM's position on economic issues is less specific. Its leaders say they support "reforming the economic system of the State," though they offer few particulars. MPs Al-Basiri and Al-Sane voted for legislation permitting foreigners to own and trade Kuwaiti stocks, a draft law to protect intellectual property rights, and a direct foreign investment law. Al-Sane also voted for an anti-money laundering law; Al-Basiri was absent. In December 2005, Al-Nashi said the ICM would oppose Project Kuwait, an estimated \$8.5 billion plan to develop Kuwait's northern oil fields, in its current form, without explaining what changes the ICM proposed.

...But Socially Conservative

¶25. (C) While forward-looking on most political and economic issues, the ICM is decidedly more conservative on social issues. As an organization, the ICM did not support granting women full political rights; both ICM MPs voted against the legislation, which Parliament approved in May 2005. Most ICM leaders claim, however, they personally supported the

legislation, but were overruled by the ICM's conservative base in a close internal vote on the issue.

¶26. (C) Despite its initial opposition, the ICM has now fully embraced women's suffrage and is now actively courting the women's vote. The organization is still divided, however, on women holding political office and is unlikely to support any female candidates in the 2007 parliamentary elections. In a recent interview, Al-Nashi claimed women's electoral participation would "assist the movement (ICM) in achieving positive results." He concluded that "the ICM is very optimistic about women's participation in the next elections."

Staunchly Pro-Palestinian

¶27. (C) The ICM is staunchly pro-Palestinian and often criticizes U.S. support for Israel (see paras 33 to 35). According to one local press report, the organization supports an "anti-normalization law with Israel." Hamas leader Khaled Al-Mishal was hosted by former ICM MP Mubarak Al-Duwaileh at his diwaniya during Al-Mishal's recent visit to Kuwait (ref A).

Shari'a: A Contentious Issue

¶28. (C) One of the ICM's most important, and contentious, political objectives is the implementation of Islamic Shari'a, a goal its leaders claim is not contradictory to the organization's commitment to democracy and political pluralism. Specifically, the ICM supports the amendment of Article 2 of the Kuwaiti Constitution, which states that "the religion of the State is Islam, and the Islamic Shari'a shall be a main source of legislation," to read "the source of legislation." Al-Dallal explained this was necessary to institutionalize the GOK's commitment to implementing Islamic Shari'a by ensuring all legislation passed by Parliament, regardless of which group controlled it, would have to be approved by a Shari'a committee before implementation. Elaborating, Al-Dallal said certain issues like the prohibition of alcohol and homosexuality, and inheritance law favoring male heirs were non-negotiable under Shari'a, but others like strict punishments for stealing, adultery, and conversion were subject to interpretation and revision.

¶29. (C) Al-Nashi told Poloff that Shari'a was "a grouping of

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laws whose interpretation can change over time." He stressed, however, that the adoption and implementation of these laws should only be achieved through Parliament. According to Al-Dallal, the ICM is "in the process of reassessing (its) ideology and policies," including its support for amending Article 2. Al-Nashi argued similarly in a recent interview that political participation would lead Islamist groups like the ICM to be more realistic and pragmatic.

Funding: No Double Dipping

¶30. (S) ICM leaders claim the organization's routine political activities and publications are funded through monthly "ICM" dues. Campaigns are funded by candidates, ICM donations, and sponsors who provide money for specific events like campaign dinners. Al-Nashi explained that the organization does not have an official budget or produce an annual expense report since political parties are prohibited in Kuwait. The ICM recently created an investment fund specifically earmarked to pay for its future political activities, Al-Dallal reported. Al-Dallal reported unspecified charity organizations used to partially fund ICM activities, but that due to increased scrutiny and stricter auditing procedures, funds were no longer being raised this

way. Both Al-Nashi and Al-Dallal insisted the ICM did not receive or provide money from/to Muslim Brotherhood branches outside of Kuwait. (Note: According to one local press report, the Egyptian government complained to the GOK that the KMB provided "at least \$10 million" to the Egyptian MB during the recent elections. We were unable to shed any light on this accusation. End note.)

What They Say to Everyone Else

¶31. (U) In addition to its website (www.icmkw.org), the ICM publishes a weekly newspaper entitled Al-Haraka. Recent issues featured articles by local and regional authors, including women and at least one Shi'a, on a wide range of subjects, such as regional efforts to combat youth drug use, private sector job opportunities, educational reform, instilling Islamic values in young people, junior traders' influence on the Kuwait Stock Exchange, electoral reform, women's political participation, and Palestinian internal politics.

¶32. (U) In an article published in the April 10 edition of Al-Haraka, MP Al-Sane argued that rampant corruption in Arab countries was caused by the absence of democracy. In another article in the same issue, a female board member of the Kuwait Teachers, Society, which is allegedly dominated by the KMB (ref F), praised the rising number of women writing in local dailies, but argued that this was "not sufficient as we are still in dire need for committed women's voices in this domain." An article in the March 27 edition addressed the obstacles to women being elected in the 2007 parliamentary elections; outlined measures that could be implemented to improve their chances, such as a quota system; and concluded, "We say to all: help the women!" An article in the March 20 edition reported neutrally on a Kuwaiti conference on women and human rights organized by liberal MPs, the main objectives of which were to "spread the culture of human rights," share human rights experience with "neighboring countries," and "confirm the role of women in social development."

¶33. (U) Articles on regional issues are generally critical of U.S. policy in the region, specifically U.S. support for Israel. One April 10 article reported on a statement issued by participants in a recent conference in Cairo entitled "For Resistance in Palestine and Iraq against American and Zionist Occupation," which called for "adopting resistance as the sole option for the peoples of the world to counter the American and Zionist aggression and to combat the corruption and despotism of the rulers of states that have chosen subservience and submission to American policies." (Note: Written by an Egyptian author, the article did not specifically endorse or condemn the statement. End note.)

¶34. (SBU) Three columnists in Al-Haraka are particularly vehement in their criticisms of the U.S.: Adel Al-Qasser, an Islamist; Dr. Sami Khalifa, a conservative Shi'a; and Issa Majed Al-Shaheen, a former ICM Spokesman. In a March 27 article entitled "American-Iranian Cooperation," Al-Shaheen argued that possible U.S.-Iranian dialogue on Iraq was the result of regional developments, such as "the exposure of the

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American role in funding and training the sectarian death squads" of the Iraqi Ministry of Interior. He further criticized the "confusion and carelessness" of U.S. policy in the region, especially "giving Iran a critical role in Iraq"; U.S. willingness to "divide Iraq into mini-states to weaken (it) as a future threat to the Zionist entity"; and, U.S. involvement in "igniting sectarian conflicts to menace the social fabric of the region." Dr. Khalifa's and Al-Qasser's articles are similarly critical of U.S. policy, particularly towards Israel. All three columnists also regularly write similar articles for local Arabic dailies.

135. (SBU) The SRS also publishes a weekly entitled Al-Mujtma, which features articles written by both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti authors and tends to be much more critical of the U.S. The "In Brief" section of the March 25-30 edition reported that "supporting Hamas and backing it economically and politically would represent backing the Palestinian cause versus the expansionist Zionist scheme that menaces the future of the region." The author of an "Opinion" article in the same edition noted that the "fourth anniversary of (Iraq's) foreign occupation...coincided with the mounting by American troops of a barbaric campaign against the Samarra region and its people under the pretext of resisting terror."

The article continued: "Iraq has become over the past three years a vulnerable entity under foreign occupation, open to Zionist penetration, espionage, sabotage, and attempts at Christianization." Another article by an Egyptian author, Dr. Jamal Nasser, commemorated the death of Hamas spiritual leader Shaykh Ahmed Yassin, praising him for "awakening the nation" and "instilling in it the spirit of jihad." He concluded, "Undoubtedly, the martyrdom of Shaykh Ahmed will push the Arabs towards solidarity to protect their homelands against this (unspecified) brutal monster."

Liberals Advise Cautious Approach to ICM

136. (C) Many liberal Kuwaitis acknowledge that political reforms will primarily benefit the Islamists, at least in the short-run, but advise a cautious approach to Islamist organizations like the ICM. Ahmed Deyain, a columnist and an astute political analyst, downplayed the ICM's popular support. Comparing the ICM to a "deflated balloon," Deyain claimed the organization was "no longer the most important political power in Kuwait." Other groups, like the more conservative Salafis, were rising in its place, he said. Deyain noted that while increasingly pragmatic the ICM was also "opportunistic," and cautioned that "they are still Islamists" and support conservative social policies.

137. (C) Haila Al-Mekaimi a political science professor at KU, echoed this view, cautioning that the ICM's substantial political influence did not necessarily reflect widespread popular support. She pointed out that the group failed to win KU's Faculty Elections, despite the general impression that the university is dominated by the KMB. Al-Mekaimi also noted that many non-conservative students participated in KMB-dominated student groups without sharing the KMB's ideology. Dr. Ahmed Al-Baghdadi, a columnist and retired KU political science professor, told Poloff that the KMB, which he characterized as "the evil face of Islam," wanted to "control Kuwait both socially and politically." Decrying the Government's "co-optation" of the KMB, Al-Baghdadi blamed what he saw as growing conservatism in education and the media on the KMB's influence.

138. (C) Dr. Khaldoun Al-Naqeeb, a liberal sociology professor at KU, claimed Islamists like the KMB were exploiting Arab disillusionment with Western liberal democracy and U.S. policy for political gain. Although he warned that the KMB was "not at all democratic," Al-Naqeeb believed (somewhat contradictorily) that the KMB was nonetheless very pragmatic and politically opportunistic, willing to discard its ideologically-influenced policy positions, like support for amending Article 2 of the Constitution, when politically expedient. He noted that the KMB never openly challenged the ruling Al-Sabah family and always worked within the political system to achieve its objectives. Al-Naqeeb believed the organization's more moderate, pragmatic elements were stronger than its conservative tribal base and that, ultimately, the KMB was "not a threat" to democracy in Kuwait. Both Al-Naqeeb and Al-Baghdadi predicted the ICM would make significant gains in the 2007 parliamentary elections.

139. (C) Kuwaiti liberals reacted strongly to the recent statement by the SRS calling on the Government to amend

Article 2 of the Constitution. Many accused the SRS of wanting to "turn Kuwait into a Taliban state." Former Minister of Oil Ali Al-Baghli, a Shi'a, argued that adopting Shari'a would restrict the freedoms currently enjoyed by Kuwaitis. Dr. Ayad Al-Mana, an advisor to the Kuwait Journalists, Association, accused the SRS of merely trying to gain popular support.

Engaging the ICM by Challenging Its Moderate Credentials

¶40. (S/NF) While there are legitimate concerns about the ICM's positions on certain issues, these should not obstruct constructive USG engagement with the organization to promote political reform. Specifically, in tandem with our efforts to support Kuwaiti liberal activists, occasionally nominating moderate ICM's members for appropriately themed International Visitor and MEPI-funded programs, such as "Grassroots Democracy," "U.S. Legislative Elections," "U.S. Foreign Policy and Human Rights," or American University's Summer Institute on Democracy and Elections, would help ICM members better understand U.S. policy positions and give U.S. officials an opportunity to more thoroughly assess the ICM's commitment to democratic governance. Such participation would also be a direct challenge to the ICM to moderate some of its conservative social positions and could potentially contribute to the further marginalization of the ICM's more conservative elements. Additionally, the Embassy can continue its efforts to dialogue with Islamist organizations through "American diwanis" (ref B), movie nights, and other representational events.

¶41. (S/NF) Of Kuwait's four established Islamist political associations, the ICM is the most moderate and poised to benefit most from continued democratic reforms. The other three - the Traditional Salafis, the Scientific Salafis, and the Ummah (Nation's) Party (also Salafi) - are much more vitriolic in their criticisms of the U.S. and Israel and hard-line in their positions on social issues like women's rights and religious freedom. Absent measured engagement with moderate ICM members, the U.S. risks promoting political reform without engaging the political associations likely to benefit most if the reforms are implemented. Other political associations are not as organized and influential as the Islamists, and less likely to be able to take full advantage of the reforms. Kuwait's Shi'a community is fragmented politically, and lacks well-organized political groupings, a cohesive political agenda, and appeal among the non-Shi'a population. Kuwait's liberal political associations, largely relics of the Arab nationalist movements popular here in the 1960s and 1970s, are similarly divided and lack strong public support.

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